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Helms Ordered to Testify On CIA Role in Coverup

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — U. S. District Judge John J. Sirica Thursday ordered that former CIA chief Richard Helms be flown to Washington to clear up disputed questions about the Watergate coverup.

Did the CIA try to steer the FBI away from hot leads in the days immediately following the Watergate bugging? If so, was it due to White House pressures or to some real CIA interest in the case?

Helms, now ambassador to Iran, may be the only man who really knows.

Lt. Gen. Vernon A. Walters, deputy CIA director, was called back to the witness stand today for cross-examination. Defense lawyers are bent on proving the CIA did have an interest in Watergate but not as part of any coverup.

At issue is a secret memo written by Helms just 11 days after the June 17, 1972, Watergate arrests. It reportedly instructed Walters to ask the FBI to limit its probe to the bugging, steering clear of areas that "may well eventually run afoul," of CIA operations abroad.

Watergate prosecutors described the memo, never published, as a "strange" document and said Walters is prepared to testify he never saw it until a year later.

Sirica ruled there is no use

"trying to cross-examine a memorandum" or even to question Walters about it. With the jury out of earshot, Sirica asked where Helms was to be found.

"Iran," came a chorus of attorneys.

"Why don't you get on the phone and get to the ambassador?" Sirica said. "I think if I order him back here, he'll come back. Let's get him back here and settle the whole problem."

The prosecution has no plans to call Helms as its witness, but agreed to help arrange for his return to testify for the defense.

Helms denied heatedly before the Senate Watergate committee last year that the CIA caved in to White House pressures to thwart the FBI investigation of the bugging. Nor, he said, did the agency have any interest in Watergate at all.

Lawyers for defendant H. R. Haldeman contend Helms testified differently before other Congressional committees in secret and that his June 28, 1972, memo indicates the CIA was afraid the FBI investigation would tread on CIA toes. They contend this shows there was a legitimate CIA interest in Watergate and thus the White House concern about protecting covert CIA operations was legitimate and not a part of any scheme to hush up the bugging.